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COMIC & CARD PICKS!

VANTAGE COMIC & CARD PICKS

Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

1

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May 1995

MARVEL RELAUNCH SPECIAL!

SUCCESS

But Are You Ready For Spider-Man: Alpha?

Why Marvel Is Relaunching Everything.

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FLIP COVER!

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MAGIC The Gathering
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A celebration began this past August when a new generation in the comic book industry shed the name Continüm and emerged as August House, Inc.
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This immortal warrior will come your way, in the midst of night, in full color every five weeks.

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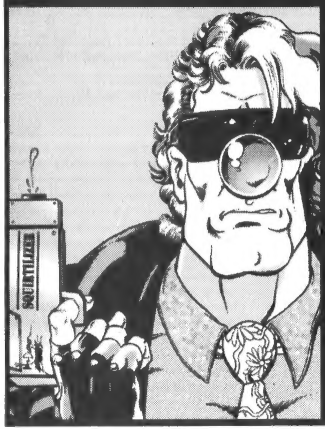

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VANTAGE™ COMIC & CARD PICKS

number one

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Cover: X-Men: Alpha ™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group.

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Vantage Comic & Card Picks
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Phone: 414-797-8221. Fax: 414-797-7960. America Online: RobVantage. Internet: RobVantage@aol.com (this gets you Rob Golub, you lucky dog). One year subscription (12 monthly issues): $34.95. One year subscription to the market guide only (12 monthly issues): $49.50 (roster limited). We welcome submissions (articles), comments, new advisors, press releases, product ideas, and free money. Write or call. We don't bite. Call or write for advertising rates. Limitations may apply. Mission: To provide comic retailers, dealers, and mature collectors with information, logical analysis, and entertainment not generally available to the public.

TOP PICKS OF THE MONTH

Gen 13 #1, all variations (Image / Wildstorm / 13 different variant covers!)
Sovereign 7 #1-up (DC Comics / Claremont X-style book)
Wonder Woman #101-up (DC Comics / Byrne on mainstream superhero)
X-Man #1-up (Marvel / Age of Apocalypse / Title to become unlimited)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

Animal Mystic #1 (Cry For Dawn back-issue / 1st appearance / Growing circ.)
Animal Mystic #2-up (Sirius back-issue and current / CFD mini continued / Growing circulation)
Daredevil #342-up (Marvel / Marvel Edge / Universe shake-up to start here)
Extreme #0 (Image back-issue / Extreme / First appearances to upcoming titles)
Judge Dredd, all (Various publishers and titles / Movie looks good)
New Teen Titans #21 (DC back-issue / First appearance of Night Force)
Prophet #1-up (Image/Extreme/Frank Miller variant)
Punisher War Journal #80 (Marvel / Marvel Edge / Biggest event in life)
Razor, all (London Night Studios / "Bad girl" comics, growing circ.)
Robin #17-18 (DC / Mike Weiringo covers, right before starting on full book)
Robin #19-up (DC / Mike Weiringo monthly)
Uncanny X-Men #322-up (Marvel / X-Men / Intro to post-Apocalypse X-Men)
Vengeance of Vampirella #14-up (Harris Comics / True origin of Vampirella)
X-Men #42-up (Marvel / X-Men / Intro to post-Apocalypse X-Men)
X-Men: Prime #1 (Marvel / X-Men / Intro to post-Apocalypse X-Men)

Watch for the Vantage Star indicating our top picks!

"The above pick list is a guide based on research, advisors' opinions, and staff opinions — keep in mind that even the experts will disagree. Comics can lose value after months or years. Read over the facts and opinions in Vantage, examine the pick list, and then make your own decisions. Remember: 1) There's no sure thing. Never bet the farm on any one book. 2) It may be fun to hunt for winners, but comics are even more fun to read! "

- Publisher Rob Golub

THE ENTIRE VANTAGE STAFF KILLED IN THE PAST

One day three years ago we were hanging out with a dictionary, trying to pick a name for the new company we were starting. We thought... Advantage? No, too long. Advance. No, that's taken. **Vantage?** Just as we started to warm up to the word "Vantage," there was a flash of light.

Suddenly, Legion appeared. He used his powers to kill the entire **Vantage** staff, screaming something about changing the time line.

My friend Magneto tried to help, but it was to no avail. **Vantage** never was published. None of it ever happened.

Ah, but there is a remedy. **Vantage** can be restarted with a #1 issue. That's right. The lamest excuse ever, just to come out with a new first issue. Hey, everybody does it. We're just admitting it.

But we're not stupid enough to just give you a gimmick. We are STRONGLY committed to your satisfaction! Along with the number one on the cover, we really have worked hard to give you our most impressive issue ever. We've unearthed some unusually special inside news, we're offering some new features, and we've got some killer Top Picks of the Month. This is an issue worthy of that special "#1" on the cover.

For those of you who are new to **Vantage,** let me just say this. Retailing, dealing, or collecting comics without **Vantage** is like driving in the dark without your headlights on. Having the right information at the right time is invaluable in this business, and that's what we provide. We've got a great track record of picks (**X-Files, Gen 13** Mini, **Shi,** etc.), and we get the news out first.

We may not be the biggest magazine in comics, but we are the best. If you're not just a fanboy, if you're serious about this business, then **Vantage** is the place for you.

— Rob Golub, Publisher

Top Pick of the Month!

CHRIS CLAREMONT'S SOVEREIGN SEVEN

May is the month DC Comics launches one of the most eagerly awaited comic-book events in history as Chris Claremont returns to monthly superhero comic books with his all new series — **Sovereign Seven.**

Sovereign Seven features Image-quality art from Dwayne Turner (**Wolverine, Stormwatch**). It will be monthly. It will be Claremont. It will be big.

Claremont created the industry phenomenon known as X-Men. He didn't invent the word, and he didn't create the team from scratch, but he did redefine and relaunch the team in what was the most successful comic book relaunch in history.

With dismal sales and Marvel having resorted to just reprinting older issues, Claremont took over X-Men in the days before top ten lists, and before new comics got after-market attention. Not only did Claremont pull in readers by the droves, not only did he keep it going for thirteen years, not only did he push **X-Men** past **Spider-Man** and **Fantastic Four,** but he also helped to create the new-comics aftermarket.

For the first time, new comics were going up faster than old ones. The only price guide published at the time was Overstreet's annual, and while it had **X-Men** #94 at $9.95, the book was traveling fast at $60. The old annual price guide system could not keep up with the super-speed aftermarket attention for Claremont **X-Men**. **X-Men** #94-up became hotter than anything today — hotter than **Spawn, Wonder Woman,** or anything else that's out there in the 1990s. Quite simply, there's never been anything like it (McFarlane **Spider-Man** approached it).

Make no mistake, Claremont is a brilliant writer who confuses the reader just enough to make him wonder, but not enough to send him packing.

And now he's back. The master has returned to monthly comics after leaving the **X-Men** only recently. **Vantage** has read **Sovereign Seven** and we are truly impressed.

We fully expect the book to blow out, and for fans to fall in love. Sales off the rack usually drop by up to 40% from a #1 to a #2. **Vantage** doubts the drop will be so severe in this case.

This is one heck of a Top Pick of the Month.

SOVEREIGN SEVEN: THE STORY

Sovereign Seven is the story of strangers in a strange land — of super-powered refugees from a reality-shattering cataclysm who are cast ashore on a dangerous alien world... an alien world called Earth.

This book is to be a voyage of discovery, as these new heroes explore the DC universe as they encounter all its icons in a fresh new light.

"These characters know nothing about the world in which they have to live," notes Claremont. "So when they first meet, say Superman, their awe and wonder at the event will be a reflection of the excitement each one of us felt when we first discovered super-heroes."

Sovereign Seven will be unusual in that it is creator-owned but integrated into the DC universe.

Sovereign Seven™ & © 1995 Chris Claremont

MARVEL RELAUNCHES *EVERYTHING*

Punisher™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Marvel has been throwing the word relaunch around for months, but only now are some hints and details starting to surface.

Relaunching the X-Men as you read this, Marvel plans to turn its attention next to its other lines of comics. Contrary to rumors (and some wishful thinking among dealers) Marvel will not be restarting all of their titles with new number one issues. "We're trying to get away from that number one mentality," said Marvel spokesman Gary Guzzo.

RELAUNCH MEANS CHANGE

When Marvel says "relaunch," they mean change. "We're really going to push the characters to the limit," said one Marvel source. "We're going to relaunch and redefine," said another. The relaunch will give readers "a new jumping on point," remarked Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald.

Indeed, Marvel plans to relaunch just about everything. As part of the eventual Spider-Man relaunch, Marvel editors have decided to publish a **Spider-Man: Alpha.**

WHY MARVEL IS RE-LAUNCHING EVERYTHING

One Marvel staffer told us, "In the market conditions today, we've just got to buckle down." Marvel's response to a slower market is Marvelution. What's Marvelution? "We're changing a lot of things all at one time," answered Guzzo.

SPIDER-MAN RELAUNCH IN JUNE

Spider-Man is to be "restaged" in June, according to Marvel Vice President Matt Ragone. It seems likely that this could include **Spider-Man: Alpha,** but we still don't know for sure when that book will come out. **Vantage** is awaiting complete details on the Spider-launch for next issue.

MARVEL EDGE IN JULY

The entire Marvel Edge group is to be relaunched in July. The new Edge will be aimed at "people who are a little older," said one Marvel staffer.

Marvel Edge includes books like **Druid, Ghost Rider, Dr. Strange, Daredevil, The Incredible Hulk,** and **The Punisher.**

According to Marvel Edge Editor Bobbie Chase, "The time bombs we're placing in the books right now (**Ghost Rider, Dr. Strange, Daredevil, Hulk, Fury, Druid**) are set to explode in July." July, again, is the Marvel Edge relaunch date.

Speaking of time bombs in Marvel Edge books, there may a big one in **Daredevil** #342. Marvel's description of the book reads: "Return of the Kingpin! The Kingpin will be shaking up the Marvel Universe big time (like in 'Punisher Countdown') — and it all starts here."

And, speaking of Punisher Countdown, that's the event that shuts down the three Punisher titles with a bang. The new Punisher title, now tentatively named **Cutting Edge,** will be launched in August.

However, before **Cutting Edge** #1 comes out, the Punisher will experience a "rebirth" in **Marvel Edge Unlimited** #1 in July. A Marvel statement implies big happenings in **Marvel Edge Unlimited** #1 , "He's been blown-up, replaced by wannabe's, and buried alive. We could do something completely unoriginal and kill him — or we could shock the industry. Bet on the latter..."

Thus, it appears the new Punisher in July won't be "replaced by a wanna-be" and can still be good ol' Frank. Now take a look at the description for **Punisher War Journal** #80: "Final Issue Blow Out! Punisher vs. Bullseye! Even if Frank lives through the brawl, will his mind survive? This is the biggest event in the Punisher's life since his family was slaughtered! Don't run out of ammo!"

So, if we still have the same Punisher when he gets his own title later this year, and if **Punisher War Journal** #80 is the second biggest event in his life as Marvel promises, this could be an important book indeed. We suggest a thumb-through at the shop.

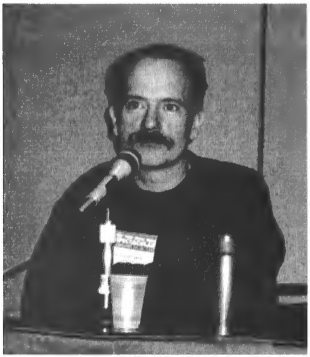
FORCE WORKS RELAUNCH IN AUGUST

The Force Works line of Marvel Comics is to be relaunched in August. Force Works is a division of the Marvel Heroes group and includes books like **Captain America, Avengers, Iron Man, Thor, Force Works,** and **War Machine.**

Absolutely major changes are in store for Captain America, Iron Man, and Thor. "Too many people have been taking these characters for granted," said Gruenwald. "We will relaunch and redefine them." If Gruenwald can get people to stop taking Cap, Shell-head, and Thor for granted, **Vantage** will be truly impressed. As stale as these characters have become, Marvel certainly has shown talent for revitalization lately. We'll watch carefully.

One thing that we do know is that The Human Torch will be leaving the **Fantastic Four** and joining **Force Works.** Also, look for Cap to lose his new armor in July.

Captain America™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.



The relaunch will give readers "a new jumping on point,"

Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald.

GEN 13 #1

HAS 13 DIFFERENT VARIANT COVERS!

Hottest Title in Comics Has Cover By Art Adams, Covers With Models, Cover That's All White, and More!

13th Cover to ***Gen 13*** *#1*

Gen 13 #1, already predicted by most dealers to become one of the hottest books in the nation, is now arriving in comic shops with thirteen different variant covers.

This could easily become the biggest event in the collectors' market since Marvel started its clone storyline based on **Amazing Spider-Man #149**. The **Gen 13** miniseries has commanded the top ten lists and dealers tables for months, and this new #1 that kicks off the unlimited series has been eagerly anticipated.

Vantage thinks that WildStorm's decision to do thirteen different covers for the first issue of the regular series is no less than brilliant. We expect fans to go just totally nuts, and we expect the heat to spill over into #2-up as well.

According to Jeff Mariotte, spokesman for WildStorm, out of every 100 copies of **Gen 13** #1, eleven will have one of eleven different covers, and the remaining two covers will be split between the remaining 89 books.

Thus, if you ordered 100 copies, you get 11 books with covers one through eleven, another 44 books with the twelfth cover, and another 45 books

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with the thirteenth cover. Mariotte noted that the exact ratio may change, but this is approximately the breakdown that stores will get.

The twelfth and thirteenth covers are considered the main covers — their artwork graces these pages. One of them is the cover as was offered in the catalogs, with **Gen 13** art by J. Scott Campbell and Alex Garner. The other cover is yet another shot of the team facing the reader.

Some of the rare covers include an all-white cover, a cover by Art Adams with the **Gen 13** teens drawn as little kids, and one or two covers with photos of live models. The Art Adams cover features a picture of Grunge holding a giant Lego block, we are told.

Some of the all-white covers were drawn on by some of the WildStorm artists, and then shipped back to the printer to be randomly integrated into the circulation. One of these covers with original art on it could be sitting on your shop's shelf right now. There are about 200 or so or these covers, Mariotte told **Vantage.**

There will also be a National Enquirer-style cover and a possible Brady Bunch-style cover. There will not be a Jim Lee cover.

WildStorm decided to do this, and informed **Vantage** of it, immediately before our deadline. We have raced to get this issue of **Vantage** to you as quickly as possible. We expect all variations of **Gen 13** #1 to disappear quickly.

Even if **Gen 13** #1 hits before this issue of **Vantage** does, copies should be available at some shops.

*12th Cover to **Gen 13** #1*

BYRNE CONFIRMED TO DO WONDER WOMAN!

VANTAGE SEES DARKSEID DOUBLE!

Fan-favorite creator John Byrne (**Superman, Next Men, Uncanny X-Men**) will write and illustrate **Wonder Woman** beginning with issue #101, according to a DC Comics statement. The statement confirms what **Vantage** had already unearthed.

"I'm very excited to be able to work on **Wonder Woman** every month," said Byrne. "She's the last of the 'big name toys' I've got to play with."

Byrne assumes the **Wonder Woman** creative chores after one if its most successful runs. Writer William Messner-Loebs and artist Mike Deodato built up the heat at Wally West speed with "The Contest" story arc and the introduction of a new **Wonder Woman.**

While **Vantage** had hoped that Byrne would keep the Deodato/Loebs storyline going, in retrospect we suppose we might have guessed that Byrne would throw everything out and start from scratch. Still, we do expect Byrne's run to maintain and bring heat to the Deodato books, since it follows immediately afterwards.

As **Vantage** pointed out last issue, Byrne generally brings heat to the mainstream books that he works on (e.g., **Fantastic Four, X-Men, Wolverine**). This one's an easy Top Pick of the Month.

In any case, Diana will now turn her back on Themyscira and return to the U.S., having reclaimed her right to the mantle of the Avenging Amazon. Her new life begins in a new city, battling Darkseid of Apokolips as he seeks to learn the fate of the ancient Greek gods. This knowledge could spell disaster for humanity and lead Diana to learn the fate of her estranged mother.

Editor Paul Kupperberg said, "I can't think of a better person than John to take **Wonder Woman** to even greater heights."

Wonder Woman™ & © 1995 DC Comics

ONE AGE OF APOCALYPSE

TITLE WILL BECOME MONTHLY

X-Man, one of the Age of Apocalypse X-titles, is to become a regular monthly series, according to Marvel Comics.

All of the new titles that began in January as part of the Age of Apocalypse were supposed to end after four issues. However, only one of the titles will not be canceled — **X-Man.**

"In essence," noted Marvel marketing manager Dan Vuckley, "a tenth regular X-Men series has already been launched. [X-Man] will, for very logical reasons that I cannot reveal, continue as a regular series."

Every other monthly X-title published by Marvel experiences reasonably strong demand for early issues. Even where the first issue was severely overprited, as was the case with **X-Force** #1, the #1 generally goes for at least cover price.

In this case, Vantage estimates that **X-Man** #1 has a low print run of well under a half-million and #2-4 are even lower. Also, many of these books are in fans' boxes, not dealers' bins. Thus, an unusually low number of **X-Man** #1s will be out there for future readers to pick up. Look for a classic case of growing demand with not enough supply.

Wolverine™ & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

Look for a classic case of growing demand with not enough supply.

X-FILES TAKES OFF!

Comic Writer Stays True To The Show

The **X-Files** comic book has followed the show to big success, with *dealers* offering each other up to triple-cover for the first issue. **Vantage** had listed the book as a pick months before it was released by Topps.

Readers are raving about how the comic has captured the flavor of the hit show, and the aftermarket has responded. **X-Files** #1 is traveling at many shows for big bucks.

Asked about the praise for the comic, writer Stephen Petrucha glowed. "I'm very, very pleased," the comic writer said, "you can't predict a thing like that."

"I'm a big fan of the show. I try to be as faithful to the show as possible." However, when developing a plot involving the central character's sister, Petrucha did sway from the show just a bit. "I had to go through a couple extra levels of approval,"

X-Files writer Stephan Petrucha

Petrucha told **Vantage.**

Petrucha, who also writes Duckman, has also submitted a script for the show, co-written by his wife. He is hopefully waiting for approval.

The book has already been scripted out for about a dozen issues, most of which are designed to stand alone as self-contained stories.

ANIMAL MYSTIC DOUBLES FROM #1 TO #3

VANTAGE MEETS "DARK ONE"

Little-known **Animal Mystic** has been heating up rapidly among a small but growing group of independent fans. **Vantage** spoke with the mysterious creator known as "Dark One."

The circulation numbers tell the story best: **Animal Mystic** #1: 8,000. #2: 10,000. #3: 18,000. Most of the time, numbers drop by up to 50% after a number one. When numbers go up, you know you've really got something.

To make the situation even more impressive, **Animal Mystic** has been published every several months with no semblance of regularity. Most books would die quickly that way, but this book has actually taken off!

Vantage bravely traveled to a damp back-alley at midnight to meet the writer/artist, known to fans as Dark One. Hey, Dark One, we asked, how has fan response been?

From the shadows he slithered, "Good, man. I got a cult following. They're all weirdoes."

Vantage shuddered as a feeling of dread creeped into our souls. To get our minds off of it we asked, "Where did your cult following come from?"

The first issue was published by Cry For Dawn, which was known for unusual books, he told us, "and when my book came out under their name the weirdoes picked it up."

What else, Dark One?

"I play keyboard and drums."

Frightening. Tell us more.

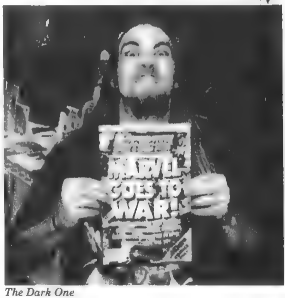
"I get some idiots. The dumbest question I've ever had: Do you draw on paper? I just told him to get out of here."

Now fearful to ask a dumb question, we left Dark One armed with new knowledge. We now know that he's in the midst of writing and drawing the last issue of the four-issue mini that was introduced in 1993.

He promises that the unlimited series will come out more regularly when it debuts later this year. It is to be bimonthly and he will have assistance to speed things along. It will not be painted like the mini was ("That's why it took so long."). Also, it will be a full color book.

Animal Mystic is, yes, a "bad girl" book. The painted pages in the mini are really just stunning.

The unlimited series is sure to be a winner when it comes out, but for now the three miniseries issues already out and the fourth one that's on the way are your best bet. In fact these are the only appearances, and **Animal Mystic** #1 is the first appearance. This #1 was also the only issue published by Cry For Dawn. The rest of the mini and the continuous series are all Sirius books. Recommended for mature readers, and for your show table as well.



The Dark One

HEROES WORLD AND MARVEL GO TOTALLY EXCLUSIVE!

NEW WAREHOUSES OPENING QUICKLY!

Elektra™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Heroes World will be the exclusive distributor of Marvel and Malibu comic books starting July 1, 1995, according to Marvel Entertainment Group.

Heroes World, acquired by Marvel just this past December, intends to drop all other publishers as of July 1, 1995. The New Jersey based distributor is to carry only Marvel and Malibu comics.

At the same time, Marvel and its subsidiary Malibu will sell only to Heroes World. All of this comes to **Vantage** direct from Marvel and Heroes World.

Marvel's product is currently sold by the same specialty distributors (Capital, Diamond, etc.) that carry **Vantage** and all other comics and comic-related product. These distributors buy in bulk and then count and divide up their copies, trucking them to comic shops and billing the shops at a profit.

Capital City Distribution, the world's second largest comic distributor, has filed a lawsuit against Marvel. For more on the suit, see our "Capital Sues Marvel" article. Otherwise, the possible effects of these big changes on the comics industry are as follows.

Heroes World, acquired by Marvel intends to drop all other publishers as of July 1, 1995. The New Jersey based distributor is to carry only Marvel and Malibu comics.

EVERYTHING CHANGES

Previously, Heroes World sold Marvel, DC, and other comics to retailers in the Northeast area. Other distributors such as Diamond and Capital also sold all comics, including Marvel's, all over the nation. Marvel has now instantly removed revenue from each distributor's monthly income.

Diamond and Capital should be able to create new revenue, however, by selling non-Marvel product to Northeast stores that used to purchase from Heroes World.

CAN MARVEL REALLY DO IT?

But how can Heroes World, a Northeast distributor with just a few local warehouses, service stores around the nation?

Vantage has learned from Heroes World sources that for the past several weeks the company has moved at a breakneck pace to quietly open up warehouses across the country. While insiders reeled, wondering what Marvel and Heroes World might do next, they were already doing it.

Our sources tell us that the following cities are to have new, fully operational Heroes World ware-

houses by June 1, 1995: Los Angeles, Dallas, Chicago, Fort Lauderdale, Toronto, San Diego and London. Heroes World warehouses already existing in New York and New Jersey will remain open as well.

Terry C. Stewart, Marvel Comics president and COO said, "The time has come to emphasize the concerns of the retail community and propel comic retailing into the future. Going direct and exclusive is the most effective way to provide improved merchandising and marketing services needed to grow the direct market business. We expect a smooth transition as Heroes World transfers its non-Marvel business to other distributors."

"Today, retailers face new challenges, bigger obstacles, and the greatest potential success. We've designed a number of systems, procedures, and programs to enhance the retailer/distributor/publisher relationship." Stewart continued, "so we think progressive stores interested in expanding their business can look forward to their implementation."

NO COMMENT

Vantage contacted several comic publishers for comment. Most declined, including DC. Rumors abound regarding what DC might now do and how it could affect the industry. Will DC go exclusive with a distributor now too? Matt Hawkins, spokesman for Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios would only say, "At this point we're waiting to see what DC's reaction is and we'll go from there." Many insiders were just plain fearful that somehow this could all hurt comics, that the quality of fans' books will somehow go down if power in the industry shifts more and more to one or two big companies.

Artist Mike Weiringo (**Flash, Rogue, Robin**) was afraid industry problems could be caused by panic alone. "I just hope people don't overreact."

WILL STORES NOW DO IT THE MARVEL WAY?

With this move, Marvel has invented a completely new method of distribution — direct to retailers. Previously, Marvel had no authority over *who* would retail Marvel Comics. Retailers purchased from a middleman like Diamond or Capital. Now, Marvel has an added measure of influence. If you're not running your store the Marvel Way, is there now the potential that you could be dropped?

***Vantage** has learned from Heroes World sources that for the past several weeks the company has moved at a breakneck pace to quietly open up warehouses across the country.*

Spider-Man™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

Will we now see Marvel reps playing a greater role in rack placement, displays, and perhaps even ordering? Will stores start to look more uniform, and more Marvel-oriented? Will we see less variety if Marvel pushes its way onto the best rack space in the biggest way? Or will Marvel simply help retailers to sell Marvel product and serve customers more effectively? Is this situation bad for the fans and stores, or is it good? Only time will tell, but insiders are nervous.

It seems that the remaining distributors may now have a greater stake in the success of medium-sized publishers. **Vantage** foresees a potential rack-battle where each distributor has no choice but to push their best books onto retailer's racks, leaving the smaller publishers behind.

RETAILERS FACE CHANGE

Former Heroes World customers must now race to apply for credit with Diamond and Capital. These retailers will need to place orders by mid-May for July comics from DC, Image, and all others.

Also, Heroes World doesn't have nearly the number of warehouses that Diamond and Capital do. Some stores will have to get their Marvel and Malibu comics by UPS instead of by a distributor's truck, which might mean a lot more bent corners and difficulties in returning such comics.

Marvel and Malibu comics would no longer arrive on a set day of the week. Retailers expect UPS boxes to be arriving from Marvel every day without a reliable schedule. For many fans, "comic day" may now be history. Retailers are concerned that UPS charges will add up, since there's usually little to no charge for delivery by truck.

Retailers get a quantity discount from distributors like Diamond and Capital, so some fear that since they would be ordering less they may fall to a less advantageous position on the discount chart. This could be a serious financial problem for some stores.

DIAMOND POSTPONES TRADE SHOW

Citing "a set of new dynamics in our industry," Diamond Comic Distributors has announced that this year's Annual Retailers Seminar, previously scheduled for May 20 to 23 in Las Vegas, has been postponed.

Diamond has been holding annual trade shows for retailers and publishers to meet each other for a decade. Marvel and Malibu had each been substantial participants at previous trade shows.

In place of the Las Vegas event, Diamond plans to conduct a series of seminars on "The New Dynamics" in dozens of cities worldwide.

Diamond owner Steve Geppi said the climate of uncertainty created by Marvel Comics' move into distribution contributed to the decision to postpone the Seminar.

"We think it's important for retailers to hear our analysis of the new dynamics," Geppi continued. "These are changing times, but we're here for the long haul and we think retailers will appreciate what we have to offer."

Dr. Strange™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

CAPITAL SUES MARVEL!

TWO INDUSTRY GIANTS GO HEAD-TO-HEAD!

Capital City Distribution, second largest comic book distributor in the nation, has now settled a suit that it had filed against Marvel, said a Capital statement.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin in Madison and it had sought to prevent Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. from terminating its "dealership agreement" with Capital.

Capital had been responsible for trucking Marvel comics and all other comics to stores in some cities, and also dividing and counting the comics, and then billing stores at a profit. Stores and publishers depend heavily on distributors like Capital. Marvel has now decided to distribute its books only through its own distributor, a move that has rocked the industry (see "Heroes World and Marvel" article).

Capital filed the suit on the same day that Marvel notified Capital it was discontinuing its relationship, March 3, 1995. Just days later, Capital announced that the suit had been settled.

The lawsuit charged that Marvel terminated the agreement without good cause and in violation of the Wisconsin Fair Dealership law. Capital was asking for injunctive relief, damages, and costs.

The terms of the settlement are confidential, but Milton Griepp, Capital's president, said Capital will no longer carry Marvel products after July 1. "Capital will list Marvel products through June and we encourage all of our customers to order those products from us during the remaining months," he said.

"We're satisfied with the settlement because we feel it will help secure Capital's future," Griepp said. "This is not a time to look back. We're confident about the future and aggressively moving forward to adapt to a very different industry. We're concentrating on how to best serve our customers and suppliers in the new environment and exploring a number of options that will replace the lost Marvel business and futher strengthen our market position."

He added, "Whatever the outcome of our suit would have been, it would have been difficult over the long run to do business with a company that didn't want to work with us, as was the case with Marvel."

In a letter to Capital employees, Griepp said the company continues to discuss the situation with other suppliers, but that "we are finding great support among those suppliers for Capital."

In January of this year, Marvel, the industry's largest publisher of comic books, purchased Heroes World Distribution, a regional distributor based in Randolph, New Jersey. "Speculation at that time was that Marvel was buying the distributor so that it could distribute its products exclusively through Heroes World," said a Capital statement.

Capital released that it has annual revenues of about $130 million and operates 24 warehouses around the world.

Capital logo™ & © 1995 Capital City Distribution

Black Knight™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Q: *Where has Marvel's Black Knight been hiding?*

A: In Malibu's Ultraverse.

MALIBU PULLS OUT OF WIZARD™

Malibu Comics will not run any more advertising in **Wizard™**, say sources close to the situation. Our sources say **Wizard™** ran a Letterman-style top ten list that was critical of Malibu, and Malibu didn't find it funny.

It was a small feature on page 210 of **Wizard** #43, with the headline, "Top 10 most noticeable changes in the Ultraverse since Marvel bought Malibu." The list then went on to joke about Thor in **Godwheel, Sludge,** and other items.

This is a serious break from the way publishers traditionally treat **Wizard™**. The magazine, with its powerful top ten list and huge circulation, usually is on the receiving end of serious butt-kissing, even from major publishers. Everybody wants **Wizard™** coverage.

Vantage can't help but wonder: If Marvel/Malibu/Heroes World doesn't even fear **Wizard™**, who do they fear?

This juggernaut appears to be almost unstoppable. Perhaps that's the message that this pull-out is meant to send to insiders. Perhaps the rumors that **Vantage** hears of a new magazine to be published by Marvel are true.

Vant•age (van'tij) 1. a) a position, situation, etc. more advantageous than that of an opponent b) a position that allows a clear and broad view, understanding, etc. 2. This really rockin' mag that tells me everything I need to know in the twisted, changing world of comics

VANTAGE

...Now More Than Ever

X-MEN:PRIME, LET'S REFRACT ON IT

Kitty Pryde™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc

At the last minute, Marvel has bumped up the price of **X-Men: Prime** from $3.95 to $4.95. The chromium cover is now "refractive." Marvel has yet to give us any additional information.

You know how if you put a pencil in a glass of water, the part of the pencil that's underwater looks wrong? The underwater part looks like it's bent wrong, or like it's not attached to the rest of the pencil. That's refraction. Thus, **Vantage** has deduced that if you look at this cover your brain will refract out of your head.

No doubt the people behind X-Men and the people behind special effects at Marvel are behind this and **Vantage** knows two things about these people for certain: (1) The X-editors are really on the ball lately. (2) After that **Amazing Spider-Man** #400 embarrassment (What? You didn't see #400? Exactly.), we doubt the special effects people are going to be taking huge risks any time soon.

We smell a cool new technology here. We smell mass confusion for advance-orderers. Stuff over $4.95 rarely sells really well for retailers, but **Alpha** was a giant sales machine. In fact, retailers have been begging publishers to keep cover prices down, saying that younger customers can't afford to keep up.

The resulting confusion could lead to varied quantities ordered, and to redistribution by the aftermarket. For example, if one dealer advance-orders enough and another gets too little, look for fast sales of the book back and forth. This could spill over into the back-issue market, as it has with the **X-Men** #1s

Plus, this book does introduce the post-Apocalypse X-Men, a pretty important minor detail. Our gut is liking this book. Not to mention, we just can't wait to dunk a copy in water.

TWO GREAT X-PICKS

For books that X-Men fans will be picking out of the bins for years, don't miss **X-Men** #42 and **Uncanny X-Men** #322 (and beyond), due out right after **X-Men: Prime** in May. These issues will set the stage for '95 and should be a popular starting point for future back-issue collectors. Also, there's been a lot of interest that's been created in X-Men lately, but some people have been reluctant to jump on to Age of Apocalypse for fear it would turn out to be a big "What If."

These people have been holding back completely, or only buying occasional issues. Now they'll have something to sink their teeth into and the strength of their numbers could take all of us by surprise.

Finally, May will be a lame duck month for Marvel books among distributors (see Marvel/Heroes World article). Anything can happen: shortages of books produced, inability of retailers to "reorder" extra copies from their distributor, inability of Heroes World to cope with the demand for new accounts and reorders, confusion over whether to get your Marvels from Capital or Marvel, or other possibilities too gory for us to mention. Although all parties involved are true professionals at what they do, Murphy's Law does seem to apply.

In any case, the bottom line is that there's potential for chaos regarding Marvel books for the next few months. Chaos can lead to mismatched supply and demand. **Vantage** will be watching Marvel very closely indeed.

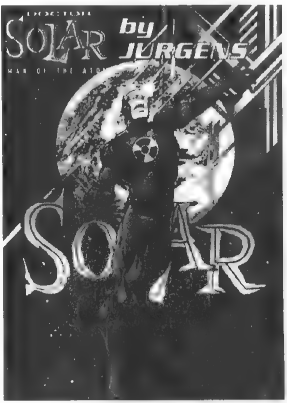
ATTENTION!
VANTAGE IS BUYING X-MEN: ALPHA 1s
(NEEDED FOR SIGNING)
Call 414-797-8221

ACCLAIM COMICS GETS AGGRESSIVE

BIRTHQUAKE NUMBERS DON'T BUST THE CHARTS, BUT IT MAY BE FOR THE BEST

Acclaim Comics' Birthquake promotion has provided Valiant with higher numbers than normal, though perhaps not the level they hoped for. Given the expensive new talent that was brought on board for Birthquake, Acclaim may have been aiming higher.

Undaunted, Acclaim Comics is aggressive and working hard to reinvent themselves in the marketplace. Of course, lower numbers on the Birthquake launch could actually help collectors in the long run. A slow Deodato-type build may be for the best.



Replacing Mistakes With Gems

"Every book we do is going to be a gem," said Acclaim Comics Senior Vice President Jon Hartz. Hartz looks to the future, despite his regrets of the past.

"We made some wrong decisions," he admitted, "Psi-Lords had taken a couple of wrong turns. We had some characters we raced to get to the marketplace."

Hartz believes that Birthquake is the answer to Acclaim's problems. Now publishing most titles every two weeks, he feels Acclaim's storytelling will benefit. "If Seinfeld was only once a month, you'd lose track of how the stories go," said Hartz.

By publishing more often, it appears that Acclaim believes they can rely on readers memories. This would free up Valiant creators to "do more with the art but still not lose the idea of good storylines," said Hartz.

Acclaim Teases And Hints

Vantage has learned that there's only about six people at Valiant who know who the Visitor is. Even the artists who draw the Visitor often have no idea who he is. Jon Hartz, of course, would only continue to tease us: "Wait 'til you see who the Visitor is!"

For heat, the buzz from Acclaim seems to be putting top bets on Dan Jurgens' Solar. One staffer remarked, "I think that's the one to watch." Executive Editor Tony Bedard told **Vantage** that the ini-

Acclaim Comics is aggressive and working hard to reinvent themselves in the marketplace.

"Every book we do is going to be a gem."

Acclaim Comics
Senior Vice President
Jon Hartz

tial Jurgens issues would "affect the Valiant universe for years to come."

The Jurgens' Solar issues were all listed as **Vantage** picks two months ago. Jurgens will draw the book for only five or six issues, but he is committed to write it for two to three years! That's the kind of stability the market needs.

Note also that the pre-Jurgens' Solar issues can be had for cheap right now, and the first few issues could really make a comeback if Jurgens pulls this thing off.

Ice Age Cards In Comics

Rumors that there would be exclusive Ice Age cards appearing in some of the Magic: The Gathering comics have turned out to be only half-true. The cards are not exclusives. They are, however, early releases from the Ice Age set that won't be out until about June. When the set is released, the cards will not be rares. They will be commons.

Magic: The Gathering is the incredibly hot fantasy card game that has taken over the brains of zillions of fans. It is widely regarded as the biggest phenomenon in fandom since the Image/Valiant boom, and it is thought by experts to be the biggest event in fantasy gaming since Gary Gygax invented Dungeons & Dragons.

Cover Artwork to ***Ice Age on the World of Magic: The Gathering*** *by Charles Vess*

Neal Adams Comics Continue To Look Good

Remembering the problems that Continuity Comics had in getting its Neal Adams comics out on time (which led to poor market reaction, which is what makes **Animal Mystic** so amazing, but that's another article), Acclaim promises to get its Adams books out on time.

Acclaim will only begin soliciting Adams miniseries when the entire mini is drawn and in the company's hot little hands, a company spokesman told **Vantage.** "You won't be scratching your heads wondering when the next Neal Adams is going to come out," said Hartz.

The art we've seen is just gorgeous. The minis are all recommended, and were all previously listed as **Vantage** picks.

Neal Adams

Bart Sears Is Pumped To Do X-O

Bart Sears is brimming with excitement when he talks about his new stint on **X-O Manowar.** "We want **X-O** to really be Valiant's premier superhero," he said.

Sears is attempting to push the envelope with **X-O.** "We want to draw the reader in with a lot of dynamic drawing."

Vantage is concerned because Sears and Andy Smith will be alternating art chores on this twice-monthly book, and collectors could become confused. What is the new back-issue collector actually collecting? Bart Sears? Andy Smith? X-O? Confusion has been known to stall back-issue demand more than once in recent comic book history.

Still, Andy Smith and Bart Sears do draw very similarly, and the title is being ordered in such low numbers that these two heavyweights are almost sure to bring in more readers. Ron Marz, also, is a strong writer. "I don't think this character's ever been in better hands," said **X-O Manowar** creator Bob Layton. Also, Smith and Sears are each signed up for at least two years — that's the kind of stability the after-market needs.

Layton should give himself a pat on the back, for the **X-O Manowar** concept is one of the best things to ever come out of Valiant. It's simple, entertaining, and it never gets tiresome: A barbarian from the past lives in our time with a highly advanced suit of armor at his command. Still, an Acclaim spokesman promised **Vantage,** "By the end of the first story arc, everything will have changed."

For great reading, and nice future picks, **Vantage** recommends the Bart Sears **X-O** books and the first several issues of **X-O Manowar** as well... already listed as future picks two months ago.

TIME CAPSULE COMICS AND COLLECTIBLES

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VANTAGE QUICKIES

EXTREME #0 CONTAINS FIRST APPEARANCES

Extreme #0, a rare back-issue, contains about eight zillion first appearances. The following Image titles all feature central characters who first appeared in **Extreme** #0: Black Flag, **Code 9** (Due out in June), **Cybrid** (Due out in June), **Law & Order, Risk** (Due out by Fall from Maximum Press), **L.A.N.C.E.R.S.**

MARVEL CHARACTER GETS MALIBU TITLES

"One character that Marvel is publishing, Malibu will be publishing by August!" These bold words were spoken by Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald. Our Malibu sources confirmed, saying that the character now has his own Marvel book, that he'll be moving to Malibu and getting his own Malibu book, and that he was created in the late '60s.

MARVEL WILL NOT RAISE GENERAL PRICES

"Read my lips. Marvel has no plans to take a price increase." So boomed one staffer. What else can we say? Indeed, we understand that Marvel will actually be experimenting with some *lower* prices in the future. Also, Marvel promises significant decreases in special covers on regular books. Such covers will be reserved for special books, like Alphas.

JUDGE DREDD MOVIE LOOKS REALLY GOOD

Vantage listed Judge Dredd comics as picks over a year ago due to the upcoming movie. However, we were cautious given the fickle nature of the movie industry — just because they say a movie is coming out doesn't mean it's coming out.

Judge Dredd, however, is now slated to definitely come out this summer, barring some unforeseen catastrophe. In other words, for those of you who have been waiting for the word to begin your Judge Dredd hunt, the word now is go.

Dealers who have Dredd books on their tables this summer in the weeks before the movie comes out could easily turn 50¢-box books into real cash. Collectors will respond to the hype and will be hunting for anything with "Judge Dredd" on it in hopes that the books will take off. And they just might.

Vantage has seen clips from the film and they are look really, really good. **Vantage** expects this movie to become one of the hits of the summer.

TANK GIRL MOVIE LOOKS NOT SO GOOD

Another movie that apparently is actually going to come out is Tank Girl. Unfortunately, the clips we've seen looked pretty stupid. **Tank Girl** was originally published in the United Kingdom, and then by Dark Horse in the United States. The Dark Horse license expired and DC now has the rights (the character is owned by the creator). The movie is to be released later this year.

Vantage confesses to having never read the books, but from the movie clips it looks like **Tank Girl** is a spoof on Mad Max and other Post-Apocalypse People Killing Each Other In The Desert movies. The film is supposed to be funny. We saw about ten minuets of clips in a room with about 100 people. One funny bit after another flashed on the screen, but gee, that room sure was quiet.

DC will publish the movie adaption as well as two minis under the Vertigo imprint.

Maude. *A heroine comes to life at the New York Comic Book Spectacular in February. Besides popping up at shows, Maude also appears in* ***Foodang*** *from August House.*

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

BATMAN FOREVER FEATURES ROBIN

Batman Forever opens on June 16. The clips look pretty good. The movie has lucked out because when they signed up Jim Carrey, he wasn't Jim Carrey yet. Carrey plays a great Riddler.

Robin (Dick Grayson) is all over this movie, and Arkham Asylum makes an appearance. Plus, there's some inside humor for comic fans: Grayson at one point is trying to pick a name for himself and says something to the effect of, "What's a good name? Nighthawk? Nightwing?" Then he chooses Robin.

Due out June 16.

NIGHTWING MINI

Speaking of Nightwing, there'll be a miniseries out with this Batman spin-off character later this year. **Vantage** has been told that the pages are unusually stunning. The mini will feature Nightwing's new costume, which is darker.

DC hopes to redefine the character to bring Dick Grayson out from under the shadow of the bat. As part of this, DC toyed with the idea of changing Nightwing's name. The editors ultimately decided not to.

Also, there is to an Alfred/Nightwing Special from Alan Grant, proof that anybody can team up.

COMBO™ INCREASES PRICE TO $4.99

Combo's cover price will go from $3.95 to $4.99 on a monthly basis starting with issue #7 in August. "We have one hell of a product for less than five dollars," said Executive Editor Joe Gallo. The Canadian price will go from $4.95 to $5.99.

Combo cited rising paper costs as the reason for the price increase, saying that they plan to beef up features as well.

MARV WOLFMAN TO LEAVE TITANS AFTER 16 YEARS!

Marv Wolfman's final issue on **The New Titans** will be #130, after 16 years of writing the book. DC will cancel the book and bring it back with a new first issue, possibly with Dan Jurgens writing and penciling it, say DC sources.

The new title might start with a partially or even a completely new team. As for Wolfman, he'll be reviving DC's Night Force. First appearance of Night Force: **New Teen Titans #21.** Look for Wolfman groupies to follow him to Night Force, and look for eventual collector interest in #21.

LOIS GETS BLOWN AWAY

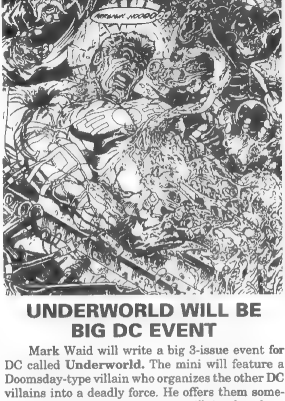
Yes, Lois does get blown away in a few weeks, and Superman must find a way to deal with his grief without abusing his powers. Lois will at least appear to be dead, **Vantage** has learned. The question is how long it will last. Last month we made **Action Comics** #710, where the "death" takes place, a **Vantage** pick.

Lois Lane™ & © 1996 DC Comics

NO SUMMER ANNUALS

Marvel will not have any summer annuals this year! One Marvel source said, "In the market conditions today, we've just got to buckle down."

DC will be publishing "Year One" summer annuals, presenting an original story from each character's or team's first year.



Guy Gardner™ & © 1996 DC Comics

UNDERWORLD WILL BE BIG DC EVENT

Mark Waid will write a big 3-issue event for DC called **Underworld.** The mini will feature a Doomsday-type villain who organizes the other DC villains into a deadly force. He offers them something similar to steroids for super-villains, but these enhancements won't come without a price. There'll be three 48-page issues, due out around Halloween.

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

X-O MANOWAR #42 SURPRISES COLLECTORS

A sixteen-page prequel to the new Ron Marz / Andy Smith / Bart Sears run on Valiant's **X-O Manowar** appeared in **X-O Manowar** #42 recently.

The bonus story was penciled by Smith and written by Marz. The intro is not just a reprint or an early release of future pages. It is an introduction to the new storyline.

RAZOR: BURN #4 FEATURES DEATH OF RAZOR

Though not mentioned in the catalogs, **Razor: Burn** #4 will feature the death of Razor. In our ongoing effort to acquire additional information, **Vantage** has reluctantly promised publisher London Night Studios that we will not release the additional details that we have learned about Razor's death. So that's all we can say for now — Razor's dead in #4.

Stay tuned for bigger and better Razor news. As always, **Vantage** is working hard for you!

Razor: Burn #5 will introduce Poison, a teenage demon-child. In other Razor news, the Razor character is to appear in 4 to 5 pages of **Barbie Twins Adventures** #1 from Topps.

There are three tiers of heat for "bad girls" in today's comics: Made It, Making It, and Nowhere Near It. The "Made It" level includes Shi, Lady Death, and Vampirella. Razor sits towards the top of the "Making It" heap.

Razor #9 sold 9,500 copies just months ago. Orders for #12 soared over 15,000, and orders for #13 are expected to come in at over 18,000. This is a fast-growing success story that **Vantage** is watching very carefully.

EXTREME WANTS TO USE MARK

"Extreme Studios has learned that Dark Horse Comics is trying to block the publication of **Mark 5** from Image Comics," said a statement issued by Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios.

"They're trying to stop a book called **Mark 5** because it infringes on their territory with their book called **The Mark.** In **Mark 5,** the actual 'mark' is an ancient talisman of power that gives whoever possesses it extraordinary powers and abilities and has no similarity to their character whatsoever," said Extreme Marketing Director Matt Hawkins. "We find this preposterous from a company that publishes a book called **X.**"

Mark 5 is actually an adaption of a property optioned by Tom Cruise for his Cruise-Wagner Production company for Paramount pictures in 1993, said the Extreme statement.

Shaiana™ & © 1995 Entity

NICE COVER FROM DR. JAY

Of the upcoming three Entity chromiums, **Shaiana** #1 has **Vantage's** eye. Once again, Entity has shown itself to be the best in the business at finding new talent — the cover from new finds Jay Anacleto and Beetovien Toybits are really nice (Jay Anacleto is a dentist — those silly folks at Entity call him "Dr. Jay"). Shaiana first appeared in **Aster** #1, a former **Vantage** pick.

The bad girl craze isn't over yet (although some companies that publish ONLY bad girls are starting to get nervous), and the heat from **Aster** should help out **Shaiana** considerably.

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

A NEW LINE OF COMICS IN THE WINTER?

Vantage has learned that Acclaim Comics is considering launching yet another line of comics in the winter. The line would take comics "in a completely different direction," said one source at Acclaim. Bob Layton is working on the project for Acclaim right now.

OFFICIAL X-MEN POSTAGE STAMPS

Marvel is coming out with authentic X-postage stamps. No, no, not little stickers. No, not decals. No, not pretty little labels.

We're talking stamps that people can mail. Marvel doesn't just buy big companies — they also make deals with foreign countries.

The Official X-Men Postage Stamp Collection has been issued by the central Asian country of Mongolia. Available from Comic Images, expect a high-quality product in beautiful full color.

VENGEANCE OF VAMPIRELLA

Vengeance of Vampirella #14-19 are to feature the character's true origin. This will be called "The Mystery Walk" storyline. Vampirella continues to be one of the hottest "bad girl" books in the nation.

Vampirella™ & © 1995 Harris Publications

COVER SPLIT WAS ON BLACK FLAG

According to Image Comics, **Black Flag #2** shipped with a split cover. The more heavily printed cover featured Dan Fraga artwork, while the other cover featured Stephen Platt art. The Platt cover had a print run of 3,500. The book may still be on some racks.

UltraForce™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics

ULTRAFORCE TELEVISION CARTOON

It seems the Ultraforce animated show is finally coming. Slated for September of 1995, it is to be part of the Amazin' Adventures weekend block on various independent stations all over the nation. Thirteen original half-hour episodes are now under production with a budget of $300,000 per episode.

ACCLAIM AND MARVEL UNITE

Oddly enough, Acclaim already distributes for Marvel under the Marvel Software label. This arrangement has now been broadened.

Acclaim has now obtained exclusive rights to publish interactive software titles based on Marvel movies and television.

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

DOIN' TIME WITH O.J. BONEYARD PRESS RESPONDS TO CRITICISM

We mentioned **Doin' Time With O.J.** in a previous issue as something that sounded so bizarre that it might be worth considering. One **Vantage** reader who ordered it called us to say he was disappointed to find that the book had little to do with O.J.

The inside front cover said: "Ha! Sucker. You f—in' sap. Fell for it again, the old gimmick title trick. Well guess what — I've got your money and the book isn't complete, it's just a f—in' prelude for **O.J.'s Big Bust Out** shipping in March! Hell, O.J.'s barely even in this book, ooooo aren't you burnt! I'm laughing all the way to the bank, whatta buncha maroons! Stop it, you're killing me. I'm tickled. A fanboy and his money..."

The paragraph continues, but you get the general idea. It's signed by Boneyard Press Publisher Hart D. Fisher whom we tracked down at a trade show. We told him the story of our disappointed reader.

Fisher's response: "I thought it was funny and I've taken a lot of flack for it. I'm sorry if somebody took it the wrong way, but it was a joke. I was trying to be sarcastic." Fisher also asserted that the book had "four pages of O.J." He promised to send a free copy of the second issue, filled with O.J., to every store that bought the first issue.

WEIRINGO ON ROBIN

Mike Weiringo helped to heat up recent issues of **Flash** (the Impulse storyline) in a big way. Afterwards, he did a **Rogue** mini that did NOT heat up. His art on **Rouge** really didn't fit the character, but now he is to draw something similar to young Impulse . . . Robin. He's on the book for a year. His cartoony, youngish art is unique and is well suited for a book like **Robin.** Recommended for reading and as a pick.

FRANK MILLER PROPHET COVER

Prophet #1 is to have a variant Frank Miller cover, according to Matt Hawkins at Extreme Studios. There will be two covers, said Hawkins, one by Miller, and another by some other artist. The second artist could turn out to be Stephen Platt. Due out now.

MARVEL BUYS SKYBOX

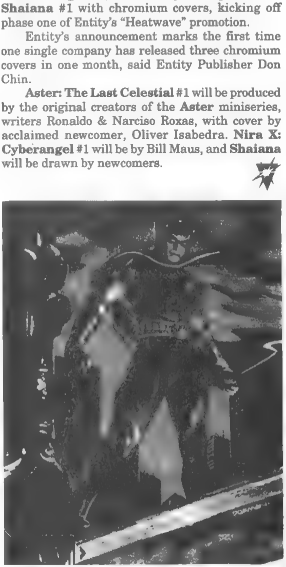
Marvel has acquired Skybox Interntaional, Inc. for $150 million, according to a Marvel statement. Marvel can now add Skybox to Fleer to become an overwheling force in the trading cards market. In recent months Marvel has acquired **Malibu,** Heroes World, and now Skybox. Imagine trying to buy a gift for Marvel. What would you buy for the company that has everything?

ENTITY COMICS HEATWAVE: THREE CHROMIUMS IN ONE MONTH

Entity Comics has announced that in July they will ship three first issues, **Aster: The Last Celestial Knight** #1, **Nira X: Cyberangel** #1 and **Shaiana** #1 with chromium covers, kicking off phase one of Entity's "Heatwave" promotion.

Entity's announcement marks the first time one single company has released three chromium covers in one month, said Entity Publisher Don Chin.

Aster: The Last Celestial #1 will be produced by the original creators of the **Aster** miniseries, writers Ronaldo & Narciso Roxas, with cover by acclaimed newcomer, Oliver Isabedra. **Nira X: Cyberangel** #1 will be by Bill Maus, and **Shaiana** will be drawn by newcomers.

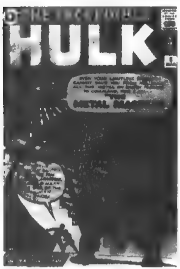


Prophet™ & © 1995 DC Comics

WIN THE ULTIMATE *LADY DEATH* COLLECTIBLE!

The Grand Prize! Help us to help you by filling out the survey below! If we can better understand who our customers are and what they are thinking, we can better serve them. Plus, we'll randomly pick some lucky stiff to win our gorgeous **Lady Death Swimsuit Special #1**, with a velvet cover, signed by cover artist Steven Hughes and two other creators! **Truly, the ultimate Lady Death collectible!**

Lady Death ™ & © 1995 Brian Pulido



The First Prize! Some other lucky dog will win this **Hulk #6**, a blast from the past that you will love to own!

Hulk ™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group

The Second Prize! Have no fear! More opportunities to win are here! Even if you don't win the Grand Prize or the First Prize, you'll still be entered in our random drawing for a free **Hulk #5**!

Just pull out your pencil and fill in both sides of this page!

One winner will be randomly selected. BOTH sides of this page must be filled out to win! Contest ends June 15, 1995! Please take your time with it —help us to make **Vantage** better for you!

Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone:_____

Age:_____ **I have been a comics fan for about** ____ **years.**

I got this issue of Vantage from (circle ONE):

1) A comic shop rack 2) My comic shop's subscription service 3) A mail order subscription service 4) A magazine shop 5) I bought it from a distributor myself 6) From my boss who buys it for the shop 7) Free sample
8) Other _____

I engage in the following activities (circle ALL that apply):

1) Own or manage a comic shop 2) Work for a comic shop 3) Sell at shows regularly 4) Sell at shows only occasionally 5) Have sold at a show at least once
6) Other activity in comics (if any)
_____

I read Vantage (circle ONE):

1) Monthly 2) Most months 3) Some months 4) Rarely 5) This is my first issue

I think that the price I pay for my favorite comic book is:

1) Very high 2) High 3) About right 4) Low 5) Very low

I think that the prices that I pay for most of the things I buy are:

1) Very high 2) High 3) About right 4) Low 5) Very low

I think that the price I pay for an issue of Vantage is:

1) Very high 2) High 3) About right 4) Low 5) Very low

My educational level is (circle ONE):

1) Some high school or less 2) High school graduate 3) Some college or secondary school 4) College or secondary school graduate 5) Post-graduate 6) Post-graduate degree

My favorite parts of Vantage are (circle up to FIVE):

1) Vantage Viewpoints 2) Reading Picks 3) First page editorial 4) Contests 5) Signature Series 6) Interviews 7) Non-Sports Picks 8) Toy Picks 9) Gaming Market Report 10) View From Oblivion 11) Picks 12) News 13) Vantage Quickies

Which would you like to see more coverage of? (circle up to TWO):

1) What's happening with distributors and how will it affect comics 2) How business is going for publishers 3) Additional news and picks 4) More columns like View From Oblivion 5) More non-comic news and picks

If you saw another copy of Vantage for sale next month (on the rack or in your catalog), what are the chances you would buy it? (circle ONE)

1) Very likely 2) Likely 3) Possibly 4) Unlikely 5) Very unlikely

I would be interested in seeing the following features in Vantage on a monthly basis (choose the FOUR that you are most interested in):

1) More interviews with comic creators
2) Recommended comics to read from comic lines like Dark Horse, Vertigo, and other offbeat lines
3) A monthly list of dealers who want to buy comics, with each dealer's phone number
4) Toy picks
5) A monthly list of free catalogs and other free stuff that I can send away for
6) A monthly update of what's been happening in the recent storylines of each major universe
7) Collectible card game picks
8) Free Rookie Artist trading card with each issue, with a limited print run, featuring a little-known new artist each month
9) More information on upcoming comic book plots from all of the major publishers
10) More columns or opinion pieces from comics pros or retailers

If you are a retailer:

Total number of copies of **Vantage** that you usually order: _____
Number of copies you usually rack:_____
Number of rack copies that you usually sell-through:_____
Number of usual copies for file customers:_____
Number of copies of Wizard that you usually order:_____

Other suggestions and comments:
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thanks for your help! You've watched **Vantage** grow and improve for a couple of years now! Now, watch what we do with this new survey info! Stand back, 'cause here comes an even better, even more informative **Vantage!**

Send to:

Vantage Lady Death Contest
13000 W. Blue Mound Rd, #110
Elm Grove, WI 53122
(or fax to 414-797-7960)

All answers are for the use of Vantage only and are strictly confidential.

NON-SPORTS PICKS

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Something just doesn't feel right. The card picks this month from **Vantage** all look okay, but something just seems wrong somehow! Top picks aimed at the little-girls-of-all-ages market? Batman cards marketed by a company owned by Marvel comics? Pin-up cards thinly disguised as comic heroes? A container that could be more valuable than the cards that come in it? Could it be that something has changed our present reality? Some guy in the card-sorting room keeps yelling something about time being changed as a trap for **Vantage,** but who can believe him?

VANTAGE Card Picks

- Ultra Casper Cards
- Disney Premium Cards
- Marvel Metalprints
- WildStorm Gallery Cards
- Hershey Card Tin (just the tin)
- Batman Forever Holograms

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SPOOKTACULAR CARDS

Cards based on cartoon characters weren't the hottest thing in the market until the Lion King movie hit last summer, and **Vantage** thinks that a repeat performance is on its way: the Fleer Ultra Casper cards from Fleer. Granted, Casper the Friendly Ghost doesn't appeal to the normal fanboy, but it does appeal to the younger fanboys and all the fangirls. Steven Spielberg is producing a movie that is due to hit screens soon, and even though no previews have made their way onto a screen near **Vantage**, the nine-card promo sheet of Casper cards that came out this month display animation that should take your breath away —they're that good. We can expect Casper cups, Casper burger meals, Casper notebooks, Casper comics again, etc. (And boy, won't you wish you had some of those books from the Fifties this summer?!) Although predicting movie success (and card tie-in success) is something **Vantage**

™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group, Marvel Metal © Fleer Corp.

is always leery of, this time it looks like a clear winner. In particular, be sure to stock up on the chase cards early—there are 24 per box, but everybody who collects them will want complete sets. Pack counts for chases: 45 packs for a set of Foil chase cards, 60 packs for a set of Chromiums, and 48 for a set of Holograms.

While the holograms will no doubt command the highest prices (there are three per box, but the set is only four), the chromium set will actually be more difficult to complete, so those might make for a better set of chases to hoard, especially since you can probably pick them up cheap until people start to realize how many they really need!

As with most media tie-ins, these cards can fade quickly, but don't forget that release of the movie on video will help pump up sales a second time!

I REMEMBER THAT PICTURE!

This is the month for non-superhero cards—after a long dry spell, we finally get another card set from Disney. SkyBox is releasing the Disney Premium Cards, a set of eighty cards which feature pictures from Disney cartoons There is clearly a market for anything Disney—Mickey probably has more name recognition than anybody else except maybe Santa—and a set featuring cartoon characters is long overdue. One of the chase card sets causes some concern (four packs per box have a chase card featuring villains instead of the cuddly good guys), but there are also two animation cels to keep collectors busy (one per box at least guarantees a good supply of them, so prices won't be as bad as the Lion King holithograms). These cards will have a long, long sales period due to the timeless nature of the subject matter, and it's difficult to imagine them doing anything but selling out quickly.

OVERSIZED DEMAND?

Fleer has been releasing framesize cards with nearly every Marvel set, and they are following up the Marvel Metal release with a set of 6.5 by 10 inch cards that capture ten of the original cards in a much larger size. As usual, **Vantage** expects the Wolverine and Carnage cards to sell for premium prices, but something else has started to happen that makes buying boxes of these oversized cards a good idea.

Binders. Fleer has started releasing binders with the card sets, and they are doing a job that should be the envy of everybody else in the industry: high quality notebooks, great sheets, poofy bindings, and... and three framesize cards in every binder. See where this is going yet? People who buy the binder to keep their sets intact are clearly after everything related to the card set, and when they find out that you have seven more framesize cards that they don't have, they'll have to buy them.

And most dealers have stopped ordering the framesize cards. Anybody but **Vantage** see a potential mismatch in supply and demand? Thought so...

KNOCK, KNOCK - WE'RE BACK

Q: How many times a year can WildStorm produce a set of cards?

A: According to sales, as many times as they want.

The WildStorm Gallery set features 126 oversized all-painted cards. The sample art displayed so far is impressive, and it's no wonder—look at the list of artists: Julie Bell, Dave Dorman, Bill Sienkiewicz, Brian Stelfreeze, and a ton more. The cards as a whole do not look at all like comic book art, but are highly detailed paintings. There are two sets of chase cards—12 cards that feature "famous" battles (a strange term for a company as young as WildStorm!) and a second six-card chase set is made up of portraits of some of the WildStorm characters.

The cards aren't chromium this time, which may slow down a few collectors, but packs should retail for about $1.50, which is all too rare nowadays. At that low price point they can even compete with pogs for kids' disposable income, and box sales to the older crowd should be brisk.

Special note to **Vantage** readers—dealers received either one cut promo card (Capital accounts) or one promo sheet with a promo card on it (Diamond accounts) that feature Fairchild from Gen13—unless this promo card is made available elsewhere later, these will be highly sought-after. Try to pick up your copies as quickly as possible before the dealers realize they may have a truly rare collectible on their hands!

JUST THE TIN, MA'AM

After the runaway success of the Coca-Cola cards (a success that matches **Vantage**'s expectations), it was inevitable that we would start to see a blizzard of advertising art—Pepsi, Campbell's, and now Hershey's chocolate. Oh, the cards may do okay, but Dart Flipcards hasn't revealed anything about potential chase cards, card set size, etc. But there is one thing that attracted **Vantage**'s attention immediately —the cards packs come in a tin display box instead of a normal cardboard box. These tins will probably be in demand no matter what happens to the cards. If you hit dealers early on, you might be able to get the tins cheaply—they might even throw it in if you offer to buy a few packs that aren't moving. Get them while you can, 'cause they probably won't make any more.

Pick up your copies as quickly as possible before the dealers realize they may have a truly rare collectible.

PSSST — GOTTA ZILLION BUCKS?

You just never know where Batman cards will show up—this time around, Fleer (a division of Marvel Entertainment) is producing them. The Batman Forever cards are an all-metal set, featuring a line-up that sounds suspiciously like the Marvel Metal cards that Fleer just got through doing: Silver Flashers (one per pack, reproducing the entire set with special backgrounds), Gold Blasters, and four Holograms. In addition, however, there are an unspecified number of movie preview cards showing up six times in every box.

But the price of the cards will give you sticker shock. Perhaps because of the licensing costs, these cards will cost retailers fifty cents a

™ & © 1995 Marvel Ent. Group. Marvel Metal © Fleer Corp.

pack more than the Marvel Metals, leaving a 36 pack box $15 to $20 more expensive than even the Flair Marvel Annuals. Ouch! Fortunately, Fleer tends to print reasonable numbers of boxes of cards, so the market shouldn't choke on the cards as long as people are willing to pay $3.50 for a pack of only eight cards.

There is one thing about this set that seems likely—the collectors who simply have to have everything will be looking for the holograms. After getting two of them from the box they've bought, they'll want the other two. Dealers won't be able to sell the sets (you can expect them to run you $50 or more, which leaves set sales as dead as the premium Man of Steel's from last year), so they won't be busting down boxes to get the chase cards, leaving more demand than supply for the coveted holograms —a situation that screams for attention. And if you can pick them up cheaply enough, keep an eye out for the Silver Flashers; with one in every pack, they should be plentiful early on, but anybody trying to put a set of them together is in for a long ordeal.

COUNTERCULTURE NOSTALGIA

Remember Heavy Metal? No, not the movie (although there's nothing wrong with the movie), but the magazine. Great covers. Fantastic artwork. Unknown artists.

™ & © 1995 DC Comics.

Not anymore. The artists who did much of that work are now some of the hottest names in the art-card world, and Comic Images has managed to produce a set of cards featuring that work. The cards are aimed at mature audiences, which should help sales even more. Olivia, Bisley, Royo, and Bell are names that collectors recognize, so as long as dealers have display sets or loose cards around this set should sell well.

Once again, this month, Comic Images is offering a binder—the Heavy Metal binder comes complete with an uncut card sheet, and this will help make the binders an easy sale for the few dealers who are willing to risk ordering them.

SPECULATIVE CORNER

Think you can name the most-watched television show in the world? Unless you already know the answer to this question, you don't have a chance—it's Baywatch. Yes, Baywatch, the babes-and-hunks-on-the-California-beach show. Apparently it translates into any language with minimal effort, and the myth of the California lifestyle makes for easy viewing. And now we have a card set.

Sports Time is manufacturing the cards, and they apparently believe in chase cards—25 Rainbow cards, 25 Platinum cards, autographed cards, and a ten-card phone card set are all available (although demand is likely to be highest for certain bikini cards). This set is obviously aimed at a completely different market than non-sports cards usually go after, but that promises at least the potential of a quick price rise if nobody orders very many boxes of the cards.

Of course, you can never be sure how things will turn out with media tie-in card sets, so don't buy boxes until you're in over your head, 'cause the lifeguards don't rescue card speculators!

QUICK NOTES

Comic Images has found its niche in the art cards market—all-chromium sets. This month they are releasing the Hildebrandt Brothers All-Chromium cards. Once again there is a 90-card set made up of mostly (or entirely) old cards redone with a chromium

coat, medallion cards, and autograph cards. Rather than the already tired Omnichrome chases, CI is now offering MagnaChrome chase cards, which should be more attractive. The price of the boxes remains high (suggested retail is about $70), and sets should be more difficult to sell than the chromium Boris and Olivia cards,and definitely harder to sell than the Conans! Given the large print runs that CI usually produces, and the expected resolicitation in a few months, the prices of the cards can't really go anywhere but down any time soon.

Somehow FPG continues to find two artists a month to produce new card sets. Tom Kidd has won several Hugo awards for his artwork, and the Tom Kidd Fantasy Art cards feature 90 of his pictures as well as five Metallic Storm cards and an occasional autograph card. A more interesting set is the Brom Fantasy Art cards. These feature artwork that will appeal to a smaller, but more rabid audience—stark, simpler, more horrific pictures are what you would expect from the artist who gave TSR so many memorable Dark Sun pictures for their AD&D supplements. These cards will stand out because they're different—they won't appeal to everybody, but they have the potential to grab more attention than most sets.

21st Century Archives is releasing the Olivia II hologram set, three holograms priced at a mere $15. There are only about 6,000 sets, but macho collectors will want to try to pick up the gold set, since those are limited to about 250 sets (dealers get one per case of 25 sets).

Tired of waiting for late cards? Well, wait some more. The Lois and Clark: New Adventures of Superman cards have been rescheduled for late April/early May. **Vantage** is still impressed with the potential of the six painted chase cards from Julie Bell and Boris, and just hopes that fans haven't been turned off by the long wait.

Authentix has brought new wrinkles to the non-sports card market — while we've seen oversized cards in boxes, they've decided we need oversized chase cards. The new Beetle Bailey cards are only a fifty-card set, and a framesize card is included in one out of every ten boxes. This seems likely to annoy people more than anything else, but their other idea should prove much more popular: one pack out of every three boxes will contain all chase cards! (Are you listening Fleer? You're already producing a zillion chase cards per box, why not give the kids a rush with a Marvelous Pack every few boxes?) Silver foil chase cards appear once in every three packs, but **Vantage** expects that sets will sell better than packs.

How do you follow-up a success like the Coca-Cola cards? Collect-a-Card is issuing the Dinotopia cards set. James Gurney's book about dinosaurs and humans living together on a small island in the 1800s is being turned into a movie, but you can get a jump on the story by putting together a set of the cards. The card set features the artwork rather than the movie stills, and **Vantage** is only concerned that the impact of the art will be lost when it is shrunk down to teeny-tiny size.

Ever wonder how companies decide how many boxes of a card set to produce? The Creator's Universe card set should stand as a warning about how not to do it: the company an-nounced a "limited" print run (the number 10,000 cases seems familiar), and proceeded to produce that many in spite of the actual orders from dealers. The original cards had a suggested retail price of about $70 a box, had nice chase cards sets, one rare chase card, featured artwork by some major artists, and sold fairly well at first. But there were a lot of boxes left over The company offered lots of freebies to dealers who ordered another case, but even gold cards autographed by Quesada and others weren't enough—they're still choking on the cards. This month they've offered to sell dealers sets for $3, boxes for $9, and chase card sets for a pittance. Who knows, perhaps we'll see boxes at the stores that price all their goods for a dollar before the supply is gone.

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COMIC & CARD PICKS

THE MAGAZINE FOR COMIC DEALERS AND SERIOUS COLLECTORS!

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COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

Not By Rich Keller

Hello, welcome to the other side of reality. In this universe I don't write for the **Vantage** Publishing Conglomerate. During the day I'm a model for all of the Harlequin Romance covers. At night I'm a congressional representative for New Jersey. However, since President of the United States Rob Golub asked so politely, I've decided to give you a tour of the comic industry in my universe. Over here, we still have DC, Marvel, and the others. Marvel has about 20 or so titles out (they're all X-Men and Spider-Man books) and all comics are still 25 cents apiece. Sure that's expensive, but it's worth it for the 48 pages of story we receive every month. Every book comes with a 3-D holographic, enhanced, chrome-plated cover and a set of trading cards. And, every character is creator owned, has been since the 1940s. Currently, Superman is at Valiant, Captain America is over at Image, and Spawn is the leader of DC's Justice League of America.

Many of you **Vantage** readers are probably wondering what happened to this month's column since your Rich Keller has ceased to exist. Well, as luck would have it, it slipped through the dimensional corridor. So, for your entertainment pleasure, here are some of his picks.

The editors at DC were no dummies...hence Elseworlds was born.

Back in 1989, DC produced a one shot story about Batman—a Batman who encountered Jack the Ripper in the Gotham City of the late 1880s. Titled 'Gotham by Gaslight,' the book made quite an impression with readers. In fact, it was so popular that they decided to publish another Batman story, this time with him as a vampire-like creature. This also was quite a success with critics and readers.

Well, the editors at DC were no dummies and they saw the potential for other stories involving other heroes like Superman and the Justice Society of America. So they created a series imprint for these stories that would signify the difference between current DC continuity and these imaginary tales. Hence, Elseworlds was born.

Elseworlds' main purpose is to take the heroes and villains you would normally see in your favorite comic and just throw them into

something totally different. We're not talking about throwing them into a universe where, let's say, Crisis on Infinite Earths never happened. We're talking about totally different scenarios, such as taking Superman and throwing him into the Revolutionary War era, or throwing Deathstroke into a post-apocalyptic world.

Elseworlds is a success for two reasons. First, the writers of these series don't have to adhere to the stringent continuity standards that they go through month after month. In these stories, they're given a premise and told to do something with it. This is where we see the great imaginations of these creators. Sure, they have to stay true to some of the elements —Batman's not a woman or anything like that—but other than that, the sky is technically the limit.

The second reason for its popularity is it leaves the reader wanting more. A story is written where Batman actually gains a Green Lantern ring, and the reader sits there and thinks 'Wow, I wish we could see more of this universe.' That's the great thing, because if the demand is high enough they can probably bring the Green Lantern Batman back. They really don't have to worry about continuity in the Batman or Green Lantern books, they just have to basically make sure that the first and second stories are somewhat equal.

Superman in the Middle Ages? Hal Jordan and Guy Gardner as officers of Adolf Hitler? C'mon, you can't beat this. See your favorite heroes from a different perspective with Elseworlds.

Remember when you sideswiped the Porsche 944 Ragtop Convertible, and you ended up paying five thousand dollars, and your insurance company canceled your policy, and you had to ride your ten speed bike to your job that was thirty miles away? Of course you do. And do you remember, as the insurance company was cutting up your policy, that you wondered, "What if...? What if I hadn't been reading the latest issue of X-Men when I went through that stop sign and slammed into the Porsche?"

Well, Marvel had the same idea several years ago. Not the Porsche theme, mind you (and I don't think Marvel is in any way promoting reading and driving), but the idea of a "what if" scenario. What if Spider-Man joined the Fantastic Four? Or what if the New X-Men had been killed on their first mission? (We'd probably only have to buy one X-Men book. Kidding, just kidding!) Eventually, that idea became reality as "What If...?" hit the stands as an ongoing series.

A character named the Watcher, who's the Rod Sterling of the cosmos, is host of this series. His job is to monitor the happenings of the Marvel universe that readers know and its alternate realities, which seem to greatly rival those parallel universes of DC. He tends to speculate quite a bit. While he does, he discovers parallel universes where a turn down a hall, or a misplaced word, could result in an entirely different reality. Sometimes these events can be fruitful, such as Wolverine becoming head of S.H.I.E.L.D., or totally disastrous, such as the Avengers losing every single battle with the Earth at stake. In the end, it's definitely entertaining for the reader.

But that's not the real reason for the book's popularity. The main reason is because the question asked is not really "What if...?" but more like "What could have been?" For example, thirty years ago, when Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four were created, Stan Lee could have easily added the web-slinger to their roster. Back then, when titles were flying left and right out of the Bullpen, the writers could have gone one way or another with their characters. This series is a great example of what might have happened if the writers had initially gone in another direction.

So, if you've ever wondered what would've happened if Marvel decided to revive Captain America today instead of 1960, then this book is right up your alley. If you're wondering why you park on driveways and drive on parkways, you might want to look elsewhere.

Hey, boys and girls, send me your material. Write to Rich Keller, Risky Associates, 25 Arney's Mt. Road, Pemberton, NJ 08068. All material received will be considered for review.

VANTAGE GAMEPICKS

Gaming Cards Market Report

by Jonathan Huston

Art ™ & © 1995 Susan Van Camp Magic ™ & © 1995 Wizards of the Coast, Inc

It's been a year and a half since Richard Garfield introduced the hobby world to collectible gaming cards. It is now becoming imperative that dealers and customers make the right decisions in regard to the new products being released. For dealers, it is especially important to order sufficient quantities before the cut-off date for ordering, but not too much.

Having boxes of Spellfire, On The Edge, or Jyhad sitting around can be extremely costly. However, not ordering enough of a seemingly small product such as Illuminati or Doomtrooper can also tick off your gaming customers, and with new products, pre-orders are not a good indicator of future interest.

Blood Wars could become a case in point. Pre-orders from customers, burned by Spellfire, TSR's first gaming card game, are virtually non-existent. The rumor mill suggests that TSR has purposely cut the print run to a level below projected demand, so as to create a higher demand for the first release.

If the game turns out to be good and popular, then Blood Wars could become extremely hot this year. If the game bombs, than at least not as much unopened product will be sitting on shelves. Stores wanting to make a last-minute order on this product may be surprised on how hard it is to obtain.

The most critical release of '95 will probably be Ice Age, currently slated for release *starting* in May. Starting in May? Yep, Wizards Of The Coast has decided to change the way they release expansion sets. Rather than one release, they will release Ice Age over an indeterminate period of time, to help control hoarding and speculating on a one-shot product

Dealers can relax and order only what they plan to sell, knowing they can order backstock later on. Customers who miss the first month or two of Ice Age pre-orders can buy it later on, still at retail. It is as yet unclear how this will affect the collector market.

Later on in the year, Chronicles will be released, probably between August and October. This is a reprint white border set, 45 packs per box, retailing $2 per pack. It will reprint cards from the 1994 series, mainly Legends, but some from Dark and other expansion sets.

WOTC has said that the restricted tournament cards, those cards listed on the Duelist Convocation as restricted to one per tournament deck, will NOT be reprinted. This means that cards like the Mana Drain and such will continue to escalate in value. No announcement has yet been

Combat Medic
Soldier
1◆: Prevent 1 damage to any player or creature.
"We'll no sooner knock 'em back on their heels than this accursed cautious general shows up and pulls 'em back together again."
—Iron Turnbuster

Vodalian Soldiers
1◆
"The creature innate mind used a nuts threat ... 10,000 ... the Hermandi Guild a minor nuisance, then thrived in the changing environment. That standard under trained Vodalia's defeated to their town, eventually overwhelming the empire."
—Sarpedian Empires, vol. V
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Blood Wars could become extremely hot this year...

made whether Chronicles will also be released over a several month period, but we suspect it will.

Orders should be much lower, as all the cards are reprints of cards existing in the market already. However, new customers to Magic since Legends was released will love these as a chance to procure cards they otherwise can't afford to obtain.

Three future gaming card products with no release date yet are Middle Earth (from WOTC), a Star Trek Expansion, and Star Wars. All three are, even without a release date, already-known, hotly-desired products.

Also being released this spring are Sim City, Towers In Time, Highlander, Ultimate Combat, Rage, and Star of the Guardians. None of these has yet shown much promise in the form of pre-orders from customers. Thus, it's the dealers who must take the risks, and therefore orders should be low.

The chance of a huge runaway success is much less likely than a bomb, and so orders should be placed with the idea of reorders in mind. One major distributor, Wargames West, has actually decided not to distribute Rage. Ultimate Combat, Sim City and Star of the Guardians all look like niche products. Highlander is a one-shot based on the movie series, and will be popular with fans of Highlander. Towers In Time, with beautiful art and an excellent sets of rules, remains an unknown until its currently delayed release.

1995 will probably broaden the gaming card market and perhaps start to solidify as part of the fantasy & comic industry.

In a sense, the collectible gaming market is starting to become very similar to that of comics. Dealers must first place orders with known strong sellers, and then divide what dollars remain between the unknown first issue product releases. Sales remain divided between new issues/products, and back issue/single card sales. 1995 will probably broaden the gaming card market and perhaps start to solidify as part of the foundation of the fantasy & comic industry.

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TOY picks

Hoo boy! Here it is the dead of winter, just a month into the new year and it's already shaping up to be a banner year for toy collectors. There are some great new lines premiering on store shelves that are definitely worth a look. Here's a quick rundown on some of the better new stuff available.

Jim Lee's WildC.A.T.s have joined Todd McFarlane's Spawn figures on the action figure aisle and all we can say is WOW! These are really nice looking figures that reflect a blend of the look of the animated show and the comic book. The package design is outstanding, each featuring the individual character rather than a homogeneous line. Jim Lee's art graces the blister cards and they really stand out on the shelf. The figures are individually numbered and each comes with an exclusive trading card. As an added extra premium, some randomly inserted cards are autographed by Jim Lee himself! Playmates has outdone themselves, creating a line with outstanding collector appeal for comic and toy fans. These are going to be HOT!

Not to be left out in the cold, Todd Toys' second series of Spawn figures will be hitting the shelves soon with 6 new figures as well as some repainted figures from the first line. Rob Liefeld's Badrock and Chapel will join the ranks of the Image figures along with 2 new versions of Spawn. The jewels of this series are bound to be Angela and the Malebogia figure. Truly a case of beauty and the beast, Angela is the super sexy Spawn Hunter created by Neil Gaiman on his guest shot on the Spawn comic book and Malebogia is... well... a really big monster.

Playmates has outdone themselves, creating a line with outstanding collector appeal for comic and toy fans. These are going to be HOT!

Did **Vantage** say big? This guy will stand 15 1/2 inches tall when out of the package (word has it that it barely fits) and will retail for the same price as the other, smaller figures. Look for this one to be VERY short packed and hard to find.

The new series will come without comics and the re-released figures will also no longer come with comics. Two of the hardest to find figures from the first series, Tremor and Overtkill, will be re-released with new paint jobs along with a repainted Medieval Spawn. There will also be a very limited version of the original Spawn figure, this time with his mask off! The "Hamburger" Spawn will be rare so keep your eyes peeled for it. It should be easy to spot, it'll be the figure with chopped meat for a face! (We're not kidding.)

Todd Toys also has a special edition articulated Violator figure slated for later in the year. This numbered figure will be available for $2.00 and the proofs of purchase UPCs from three of the first series figures. This looks like a great way for Todd Toys to clear out all those Violator figures that are clogging the shelves of America.

The new Star Trek figures are out and some long-awaited figures are finally available. Playmates has changed the blister card art once again and has returned to trading card premiums, ditching the much maligned spacecaps. Some previously released figures are featured on the new card backs — watch for these to be re-released on the new cards. Word has it that the impossible-

It should be easy to spot, it'll be the figure with chopped meat for a face! (We're not kidding.)

to-find Thomas Riker and Data in "Redemption" uniform will be re-released on the new cards as well, making these first release rarities even more desirable to figure collectors.

New Deep Space Nine figures are also available and these too feature a new card design. The first six figures are an odd lot comprised of Next Gen heads on standard bodies. The figures first appeared with pictures of six figures on the back of the blister card. Newer shipments have an additional figure, Vash, added to the lineup. Watch for a second wave of DS9 with lots of new characters within a month or two.

But wait! That's not all. New York's Toy Fair is this month and word has it that there are some incredible things in store this year. Kenner will be showing Star Wars figures along with lines developed for the films Congo and Batman Forever. Unfortunately they are showing only to buyers this year and will not allow press to see any of it until a couple of weeks after Toy Fair.

ToyBiz will continue to expand in the coming year, with endless additions to their existing lines as well as a couple of new ones. Watch for X-Men 2099 to branch off the highly successful X-Men line in the coming year. Our particular favorite in this series is Skullfire. His hands are clear with his bones cast inside. When you remove his gauntlets you can see his glowing skeleton. Creepy!

Marvel fans will finally be able to get a Ghost Rider figure as the hell-spawned biker gets his own line of figures later this year. The line will also include many glow-in-the-dark parts to add to the fun. Fans have been clamoring for these for a long time and from what I have seen of them they will be very pleased.

And that is just a fraction of the new figures that will be coming your way in the coming year.

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RINGO

Vantage catches up with Mike Wieringo

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VANTAGE: *Besides Justice League, Flash, and the Rogue mini you haven't done any other pro work at all, correct?*

WIERINGO: I did a two-issue miniseries ... for a small company called Millennium Publications. That was, I think ... in '91. That was not long after I graduated college. So that was my very first work.

VANTAGE: *Your art style seems unique. I've never seen anything in comics that was quite like it. Do you go out of your way to do this, or is that surprising to you? Am I telling you something that surprises you? (laughter)*

WIERINGO: It depends on how you mean unique.

VANTAGE: *I mean it in a positive way.*

WIERINGO: Cartoony?

VANTAGE: *I guess you could say cartoony.*

WIERINGO: It's real cartoony. A lot of people have told me that and I think that is sort of the going trend. I know that guys like Mike Parobeck (Batman Adventures) have been getting a lot of recognition recently. To me, stuff that is cartoony, simple and cartoony, has more life to it than stuff that's really realistic and heavily rendered. I just enjoy that kind of stuff more and I guess I am a big fan of animation. The stuff that I am doing now, like on this last issue of Rogue, is sort of moving in that direction and it might not exactly be appropriate for the project. I don't know, I haven't had any real feedback from Marvel on it, but I know I got a review, I think it's in Flux magazine, and they said I wasn't appropriate for the miniseries, which may or may not be true, but that is just the kind of stuff I do.

VANTAGE: *Do you think that there are some things that your style is more appropriate for... less appropriate for?*

WIERINGO: I don't think that my stuff is real appropriate for, I guess, dark and grim

Having helped bring fans to Flash at "Terminal Velocity" speed, this up-and-coming artist now turns his attention to Robin. Vantage thinks his style is perfect for it, and we expect fans to jump on board quickly. Here's his name Ringo, and we think he's gonna be a big star.

Flash © & ® DC Comics

and gritty ... uh, and I'm going to be doing the Robin series for DC and that sort of is the Batman family of books, dark. Gotham City is a very dark city and very grim and gritty, but I think it might be offset a little bit by the fact that Robin is a kid. You know, and he goes to high school and so there is a lighter side. He is less serious than Batman is, and there is a lighter side to the book, so I think it is appropriate for that. I am not exactly sure I was appropriate for the X projects that I did although they were fun. The work that usually gets published by the X offices is usually, uh, I guess more highly rendered and just darker and grittier, and I'm just not in that vein.

VANTAGE: *Who is the writer on Robin?*

WIERINGO: Chuck Dixon is the writer. He did all three miniseries and he's been doing the ongoing series as well.

VANTAGE: *Have you noticed a difference between working with Chuck Dixon or Mark Waid or...*

WIERINGO: I haven't actually started on Robin yet but I've read all the books and his style of writing is really high action, fact paced, and the stuff that he did on the miniseries was, I think, a little tighter as far as maybe panel count per page. I think that he has kind of loosened up and opened up quite a bit in the series and I think it is going to be fun because looking through the books I see that there's not much more than five or six panels per page and that doesn't happen very often either. It's usually three or four panels a page and that is just going to leave it really open. It will probably be a

I don't think that my stuff is real appropriate for dark and grim and gritty...I'm just not in that vein.

I know it's been a dream of mine to work in the Batman family of books for a long time so this is sort of a dream come true.

lot of fun, so I am really looking forward to it.

VANTAGE: *How long would you like to stay on Robin or do you have a plan already as to how long you will be on Robin?*

WIERINGO: I don't really have a plan, I'm contracted to do a year. It depends on how the experience goes. I know that it's been a dream of mine to work, I guess, in the Batman family of books for a long time so this is sort of a dream come true. But I sort of... I tend to get bored easily. I would really like to start playing around with the idea of doing a creator-owned project, if I could, if somebody would be interested.

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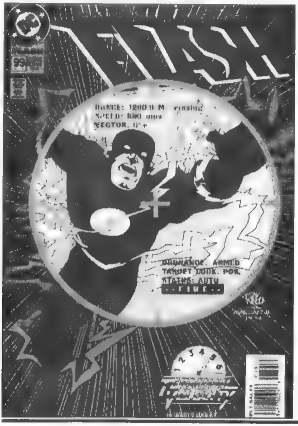

VANTAGE: *You've started to become somewhat of a hot artist in the industry...*

WIERINGO: I like to hear that.

VANTAGE: *An up-and-coming hot artist. How do you feel about that? How do you react to that or how do you react to me telling you that?*

WIERINGO: Well, I don't get much feedback, really, unless I hear something like that from a magazine. I know they just did an article in the latest issue of **Wizard**, where they choose artists that they think don't get enough recognition, I guess, and they chose me as one of those. It's a big honor. I feel pretty gratified when I hear stuff like that. When I decided to do comics I didn't set out with the idea that I wanted to be considered hot or anything like that. I think I just wanted to draw comics because it's something I really enjoy and if any fame or success comes with that, then that is just a plus.

THE VIEW FROM OBLIVION

We foresaw our doom too late last year, and by December 15 we were referring to New Year's Eve as Oblivion Hour. I suppose it was fate in a "life imitates art" sort of way. We should have expected repercussions in the space/time continuum after Zero Hour and The Age of Apocalypse storylines were published in the same year. We should have seen it coming. We should have done something.

The "we" to which I refer is, of course, Oblivion Team, a cynical group of mortals banded together to take every advantage of the perks that came with our jobs. Years ago, implementing a strength in numbers philosophy, we founded Oblivion Base and the Team moved in together.

We saw our doom too late last year. I suppose it was fate in a "life imitates art" sort of way.

This, however, was not the disaster one might expect. Taking a cue from the Legion of Super Heroes, we made sure there was no duplication of powers in our headquarters. Various team members were able to procure for us numerous free things, among them cable channels, movie previews and entry passes, food, and, of course, all the comic books we cared to read. Oblivion Team was entrenched and living the good life.

Understanding that with great power comes great responsibility, we decided to use our abilities for the betterment of others. Marshaling our resources, we began production on the "Oblivion" TV show, a short-lived cable access program about comic books and alternative entertainment which, in the end, fell victim to its own title.

All in all, producing "Oblivion" was a great experience. We learned that if you show up at a comic convention with thousands of dollars of professional video equipment, they let you in free. I was also able to carry on lengthy interviews with Peter David, George Perez, Matt Wagner, Kelly Jones, Chris Claremont, and numerous other comic professionals. It was a fanboy's dream.

Despite the demise of the show, Oblivion Team carried on. We had a couple of decent years, with some Team members leaving, being replaced by new members, and eventually returning, just like in the comics. In retrospect, it's easy to see that the cornerstone of life for all

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Did Baby Legion Do It?

of us was the local comic shop, an entity we'd been visiting for years.

The Comic Shop (the store's real name will remain classified for security reasons) appeared on the scene in 1986, and it's the reason that I collect comics today. Although I'd been an avid reader as a child, I went cold turkey for about a decade until the day I called a local radio station to answer a trivia question. The Comic Shop had given the station some question cards from a Star Trek trivia game to use in a contest, the prize being a gift certificate to the store.

The trivia question was "What vehicle did Captain Kirk use in the episode 'A Piece of the Action'?" and my answer, of course, was "a car." (I think the Iotians, those aliens-turned-gangsters, actually referred to them as "flivvers" or something, but the DJ was none the wiser.) Rather than let the gift certificate go to waste, I decided to check out the new comic store, and the path of my life diverged to such an extent that I can't imagine where I would be now if I hadn't been tuned in to the radio that day.

I quickly became one of the store's most frequent customers. Later on, after the owner broke his hand carrying firewood and was forced to hire part-time help, I became The Comic Shop's first employee. I worked there throughout college, and, by the time I graduated, the store had blossomed into a chain. The owner left town to look after his newest store, and the reins of the original were turned over to me.

Of the friends I have now, I met roughly half of them at The Comic Shop. I also met all of my roommates from Oblivion Base there. It's where we all hung out to talk, and where we gathered to make plans. It was the place to leave messages for anyone we wanted to contact, and the place to look for anyone we needed to find. Actually buying comics was totally secondary to the social functions that the store encompassed.

We had a scary moment in late '93 when the owner decided to sell the store. But it was unnecessary worry on our part when Oblivion Team member Earl, who managed one of the owner's other stores, opted to move back home to Oblivion and buy out the store himself. Unfortunately, this only bought us a little over a year, and then the countdown to Oblivion Hour began.

The clues were subtle at first. Like established characters that leave a TV show approaching cancellation, many of our long-time customers began to move away. Then Oblivion Team members began to act out of character. The clearest example involved me. After years of confirmed bachelorhood, during which I swore I would never get married, much less have children, I announced my engagement and my impending fatherhood.

Earl also announced that he was selling the store. He was ready to let go of the original Comic Shop and go back to managing another one. Not only that, but the interested buyer was clueless as to how comics worked. We all knew he would destroy the atmosphere — and, most likely the business — of The Comic Shop. What was to become of our hangout? It was like Sam Malone selling Cheers to an outsider.

Earl's last day at the store was to be December 31, and my wedding was set for January 1. It became clear to us all that New

After years of confirmed batchelorhood, during which I swore I would never get married, much less have children, I announced my engagement and impending fatherhood.

Year's was the nexus point. Oblivion Hour. A coincidence? We thought not. Someone had to be manipulating our reality. Our very lives were being altered.

For some it appeared as though the new time line was eliminating 1994 completely. Earl, who had given up being a manager to run his own business, was returning to the store he'd left. One Oblivion Team member who had moved to New Orleans for the worst year of his life was returning as though he'd never left. Another member, who had left McDonald's in 1994 to work at The Comic Shop, anticipated having to return there. Everything that had changed in 1994 was returning to the status quo, just like it works in the comics when a book changes writers.

Even bigger changes were afoot. As the "Comic Shop Show" was being taken off the air, I, the single guy, was being spun off onto a family sitcom. Another Oblivion Team member who worked for the sheriff's department was concerned that, in the new time line, he would end up in a revival of 21 Jump Street. Obviously, our continuity was being rewritten.

Earl and I went to Pizza Hut to discuss it, and I noticed that the hour hand on the wall clock was making a complete revolution every two minutes. Paranoia began to set in. Then the final piece fell into the puzzle. I opened the latest issue of **Vantage** and discovered the catalyst of Oblivion Hour spelled out in black and white. It was right there in the ads. "The entire staff is killed in the past! Who did the dirty deed? Find out in Vantage #1."

It all made sense. I was going to die in the past, and the resulting changes in time would spark Oblivion Hour. Someone's attempt to restore the time line would land me, uncharacteristically, with a wife, a child, and a new job. And a magazine that I'd been writing for for seven months would now be publishing its first issue. This must be how the John Byrne Superman felt when it turned out that Ma and Pa Kent were still alive.

A coincidence? We thought not. Someone had to be manipulating our reality. Our very lives were being altered.

I am writing this in early March. The Crisis has come and gone, and the Anti-Monitor now owns and operates The Comic Shop. I haven't gone back to see what it's like. As Foghorn Leghorn used to say, "I might, I say, I just might be in there."

My wife Susan and I have moved out of Oblivion Base into a place of our own. I feel a little like Mr. Miracle when he moved out of the Justice League International headquarters to live with Big Barda in the suburbs. Now that I think about it, if it weren't for The Comic Shop, Susan and I never would have met. Oh, and remember how the last page of DC's Zero Hour crossovers faded to white as the time line changed? Many of our wedding photos do the same thing. Maybe agents Mulder and Scully wouldn't accept that as proof, but we know that it's photographic evidence of Oblivion Hour.

There is a moral to this month's nostalgic little tale. If you've got your own Comic Shop where you and your buddies hang out, enjoy it while you can. There are big changes coming in the industry, and I'm still concerned that comic stores as we know them may be, or become, endangered species. You don't know what you've got until it's written out of continuity...

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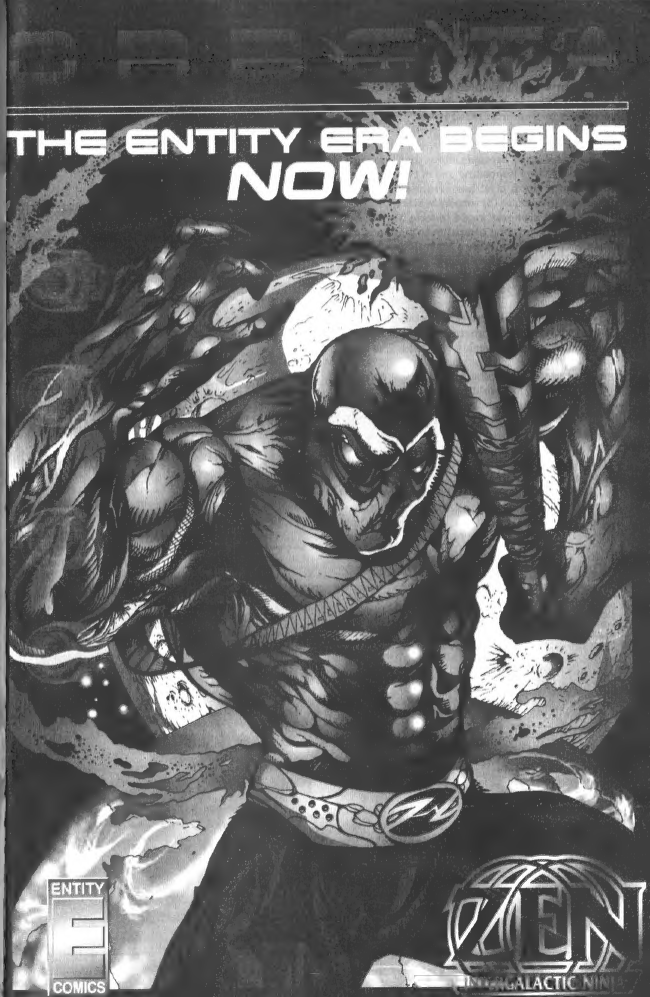
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